

THE ART OF DISAGREEING

Training Guide

Getting Started

This simple guide will help you to host a short training course on the art of disagreeing. The course will give your group an opportunity to consider a biblical perspective on disagreement as well as to gain practice in disagreeing with both kindness and courage.

Planning the Course

You might host the course as 6 sessions and assign participants a chapter of reading in preparation for each session. Alternatively, you could ask participants to read the entire book beforehand and host a one-day event that includes the 6 sessions.

How to Run Each Session

We recommend that each session includes:

- A large group conversation using the discussion questions
- An interactive element in which participants are paired off to complete an activity
- A large group time to share and recap learnings from the activity time and to pray

SESSION 1: Introduction

Discussion Questions

1. Is disagreement getting worse in modern society? If so, what do you think is causing that?
2. Have you ever witnessed disagreement to be destructive in your life or the life of someone you know? What was the result?
3. In your own experience, what has made the difference between productive disagreements and unhealthy disagreements?

Interactive Activity

Work as a pair to make three lists:

1. Common points of disagreement in modern society
2. What contributes to unhealthy disagreement
3. What contributes to healthy disagreement

SESSION 2: Chapter 1

Discussion Questions

1. How do Christians disagree about kindness today? What passages in the New Testament can you think of that are relevant to these disagreements?
2. Have you ever observed kindness “open a door” toward a better understanding and dialogue between two opposing views? What happened?
3. In your own life, how do you know when to withdraw from a person who disagrees with you, and when to keep talking?

Interactive Activity

In pairs, take turns reading and responding to contentious statements kindly. Offer suggestions on ways to express kindness more clearly.

Examples of contentious statements (feel free to add your own):

- “I think so-and-so is a horrible person. Anyone who votes for them is a monster.”
- “Well, that’s just something people say to make themselves feel better.”
- “Such-and-such is the key to solving such-and-such.”
- “That’s just what so-and-so says, I don’t know why anyone would believe that.”

SESSION 3: Chapter 2

Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, why is courage important amid disagreement? What happens in a disagreement when courage is lacking?
2. How do we know the difference between true courage and fake courage?
3. In your own life, how have you experienced being courageous to feel vulnerable? How have you experienced it as freeing?

Interactive Activity

In pairs, talk about how you might respond courageously in difficult disagreement scenarios.

Scenarios (feel free to add your own):

- You are out to lunch with several coworkers. A current news event arises as a topic of conversation. A passionate opinion is stated by several others on the assumption that everyone else already agrees. But in your heart of hearts, you don’t agree, and you feel the issue is deeply important.
- You are gathering with family members. One of them drudges up an issue you’ve previously expressed an opinion about that that family member dislikes. They ask others’ opinions first, confirming a general consensus, and leave it open-ended whether or not you speak up.
- You are in a small group at church. Someone mentions that they can’t stand when a particular secondary theological issue is discussed, because real Christians know the right answer is X. You disagree on that theological issue, or are more open to other interpretations.

SESSION 4: Chapter 3

Discussion Questions

1. What does it feel like when someone is not listening carefully to you?
2. What skills have you found most helpful to better hear and understand different perspectives?
3. How do we know when we should learn something from a conflict vs. when we should disregard what the other party has said? Give an example from your own experiences or observations.

Interactive Activity

Split into pairs. Each person should take a turn stating a controversial opinion they hold. It can be lighthearted, like “Cats make better pets than dogs.”

Their partner should take the opportunity to ask questions and practice listening well.

The pairs should offer each other feedback on what might have helped each of them feel more heard and respected when they were the one stating something controversial.

SESSION 5: Chapter 4

Discussion Questions

1. When you are in a disagreement, what strategies have you found effective for disarming the other person and helping your words get a hearing?
2. How can we tell the difference between effective diplomacy and untruthful flattery? In seeking to build bridges, when do we know if we have gone too far?
3. Describe a time in which an argument was used effectively without the receiving party feeling alienated or embarrassed. What made this effective?

Interactive Activity

Split into pairs. Each person should take a turn stating a controversial opinion they hold, with which their partner disagrees. (It can be the same topic/statement as they used in the previous session.)

The person who stated the opinion should then try to persuade their partner to agree with their opinion. They should employ the persuasion tactics outlined in the chapter.

The pairs should offer each other feedback on what might have helped make their argument more persuasive.

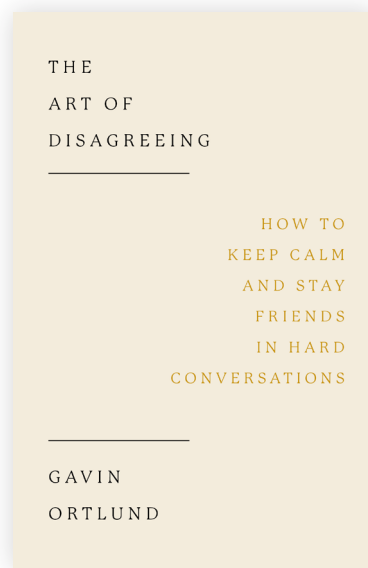
SESSION 6: Chapter 5

Discussion Questions

1. What indicators do you watch for to be sure that you are acting out of godly love when you disagree with others?
2. What has surprised you about disagreement in general or about your own approach to disagreement as you've read this book?
3. If you focus on just one area of growth as a result of reading this book, what will it be and why?

Interactive Activity

For this session, select a pair to model a few disagreements. Ask everyone to give feedback after each disagreement on the kindness, courage, listening, and persuasive tactics employed.



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